

# NEWS RELEASE

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*For Immediate Release*

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Ronald J. Tenpas, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Illinois, announced today that on June 25, 2003, a Federal jury sitting in East St. Louis found **DAVID J. RENNICKE**, age 31, of 5427 Centreville, Illinois, and his wife, **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE a/k/a CRYSTAL D. DEWALT**, age 38, also of 5427 Gay Avenue, guilty of participating in a conspiracy to defraud the Department of Veterans Affairs ("the VA") and with making false statements to the VA and the Social Security Administration.

The evidence adduced at trial revealed that after a brief period of service in the Navy, **DAVID J. RENNICKE** applied for disability compensation from the VA for a back injury. The VA began awarding **DAVID J. RENNICKE** benefits based upon a finding of 20% disability. Beginning in September, 1999, **DAVID J. RENNICKE** and **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** began falsely representing to VA physicians and other personnel that **DAVID J. RENNICKE** was unable to walk, wheelchair bound and dependent upon **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** to assist him in his personal care. As a result, the VA overpaid **DAVID J. RENNICKE** \$118,000 in disability benefits and gave him \$8,000 for the purchase of a vehicle to which he was not entitled. The VA sustained further monetary losses in providing **DAVID J. RENNICKE** with unnecessary prosthetic equipment, to include an \$11,000 wheelchair lift. **DAVID J. RENNICKE** and **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** attempted to obtain a \$43,000 home modification grant from the VA, but they were not successful due to the unfeasibility of modifying their home, which was in a state of disrepair. Videotaped surveillance in April, 2003 captured **DAVID J. RENNICKE** walking, lifting, bending, and pushing a loaded wheelbarrow in his yard.

In 1999, **DAVID J. RENNICKE** also falsely and fraudulently informed the Social Security Administration that he was paralyzed from the waist down, that he had lost the use of the right side of his body, and that he was dependent upon his wife for his personal care. **DAVID J. RENNICKE'S** attempt to collect disability benefits from the Social Security Administration failed.

Similarly, in 1999, **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** falsely and fraudulently informed the Social Security Administration that she could not walk, was wheelchair bound, and was dependent upon her husband for her personal care. Following a March, 2000 hearing before an Administrative Law Judge, **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** began receiving \$500 per month in Social Security Disability benefits, retroactive to 1997. In December, 2002 **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** also falsely and fraudulently informed the Social Security Administration that she and **DAVID J. RENNICKE** had separated, thereby meeting the financial need requirements to qualify for the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program.

**DAVID J. RENNICKE** and **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** face penalties of up to five years of imprisonment, a \$250,000 fine, or both, and up to three years of supervised release on each count of conviction. **DAVID J. RENNICKE** was convicted of one count of Conspiracy to Defraud the Department of Veterans Affairs and two counts of Making False Statements, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Sections 371 and 1001. **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** was convicted of one count of Conspiracy to Defraud the Department of Veterans Affairs and four counts of Making False Statements.

Immediately after the jury found **DAVID J. RENNICKE** and **CRYSTAL D. RENNICKE** guilty, they were taken into custody pending sentencing to be held on September 20 , 2004.

The charges were a result of an investigation started by the Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Inspector General, Criminal Investigations Division in 2001 after alert VA employees became suspicious of **DAVID J. RENNICKE**. The Social Security offenses were discovered during the course of the investigation, and a joint investigation with the Social Security Administration, Office of Inspector General, Office of Investigations started. The Centreville Police Department also assisted in the investigation.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Suzanne M. Garrison.